

Tyranny of Partition: A Retrospective Analysis of Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*

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Abstract

The Partition of India was the route of separating the sub-continent along parochial lines in 1947 as India achieved its independence from British Empire. It led into a Muslim dominating northern state of Pakistan and Hindu predominating southern part became the Republic of India. Partition however demolished both India and Pakistan as it averted many lives in riots, rapes, murders and looting but also about 15 million people were displaced from their homes. The two countries commenced their independence with bust economies and lands without an entrenched, competent system of government. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* is a modern classic which conceals an inclusive revelation of life signifying the chaos that partition played on the people of the country both at the social and individual levels. It portrays the realistic historical documentation of the atrocious confrontations caused by the partition through literary perspective. As Chaman Nahal himself was a refugee, he writes with incredible ingress and realism. Therefore he has written his own experience through the character of Lala Kashiram and his son Arun. The novel is about the mum environment before the declaration of Partition, the awful incidents caused by the partition and the wretched circumstances of the deracinated refugees after the Partition. Here in this paper, I propose to examine poignant description of historical trauma of the theme of Partition in *Azadi*.

Key Words: Partition, Refugee, *Azadi*, Trauma.

Background

Azadi, one of the novels of Gandhi Chorus, is deemed Chaman Nahal's best novel. Nahal was stimulated to write this novel from his personal experience of having lived in Sialkot at the time of Partition. He himself acknowledges the autobiographical nature of *Azadi* by calling it "...a hymn to one's land of birth, rather than a realistic novel of the Partition". (Nahal, 10) The novel is historical, political, and above all, a great work of art. Nahal has represented life-like picture of the interlude of the Partition. We certainly feel dismayed when we read about the murders, massacre, rapes, burning, looting and the condition of uprooted refugees caused by the partition. In this regard, K R. Srinivasa Iyengar says: "*Azadi* is about the partition of India that held the subcontinent in a nightmare of horror for months and left a trial of phenomenal bitterness and misery. Even at this distance of time, the wounds bleed afresh at the prod of memory". As we know Chaman Nahal himself was the sufferer of partition, a refugee and he faced off bitter experiences throughout the journey across the border. Therefore, he has written his own experience through the character of Lala Kashiram and his son Arun.

Protagonist (Lala Kanshi Ram) Binary Ideology

The novel *Azadi* commences in Sialkot, now in Pakistan. According to the writer, in Sialkot where Muslims are in majority, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs were living peacefully before partition. But it got distressed when Lord Mountbatten affirmed the creation of India and Pakistan. A kind of fear, hatred, and enmity increased among the people of Sialkot and for first time riot broke out there. In *Azadi* Chaman Nahal, through his protagonist, Lala Kanshi Ram also conveys his idea of partition and the British rule. Lala Kanshi Ram has dual feelings towards the British. He admires them for their qualities, but criticizes them for their faults. He enjoyed the safety of British Raj and hugged it lovingly. The British had brought some kind of peace to his land that was torn apart. He says: "They are a nation which cannot be easily beaten, he thought. A handful of them have kept us under their feet for over two hundred years and now that Hitler too has met the same fate at their hands." Lala Kanshi Ram also praised the controlling power of the British rule and police officers. For example, he had great faith in General Ressa But just before leaving his house Lala Kanshi Ram blames the British for not protecting the refugee. He also blames the

faults of the British. If the British were going to lose India, it was not because of Gandhi or the awakening amongst the masses, it was because of the tactical error they made in sending out an ugly Viceroy in the crucial days of their Raj.

Violence & Rampant Homicide

That Nahal was not at all happy with the Partition of India and how deep his anguish and anger were, are vividly expressed in the novel, *Azadi*. His purpose in this novel is to present the most comprehensive account of the Partition. Lala Kanshi Ram knows that the Viceroy is to make an important announcement over the radio on the evening of 3 June, 1947 and this puts an end to all speculations. He looks tense and dreads the horrible consequence, "if the English agree to give Pakistan to Jinnah." (27) Lala Kanshi Ram fears the division of the country. He sees in it the shrewd British plan. He knows the British policy of encouraging the Partition. His faith in Gandhi's oath of not accepting the Partition looks shaken. Partition disturbs the peaceful and complacent life of the people and the novelist explores this disturbance with profound sympathy and condemns the inhuman atrocities perpetrated on the innocent people. Kanshi Ram's world is shaken by the creation of Pakistan and he stands as a shattered individual, his cherished beliefs and values not giving him support. The account of his migration to India along with his family, in the words of M.K.Naik, "...is easily one of the most comprehensive fictional accounts of Partition holocaust in Indian English Literature". (Naik, 232) This shows that the novelist was not happy with partition of India and he poignantly expressed the feelings of anguish and anger about it in *Azadi* which is predominantly a political novel, for example Lala Kanshi Ram, the protagonist, is against the partition. He blames the English, as saying: "Yes, they (the British) are the real villains, they had let the country down, they had let him down, he who put such faith in them".

The news of the Partition is taken differently by the different communities. Muslims go wild at the news. They celebrate it by exploding the firecrackers. The noise and light of these crackers torments the Hindu and Sikh population, and makes them lose their appetite. The Muslim homes and their roof-tops are lit with earthen lamps, and more and more lights come on as if the earth had suddenly erupted in a volcanic explosion, cutting so many holes in the surface of the city. They display their joy of dancing, mock fighting and singing and by forcibly taking the procession through the Hindu Mohalla where Lala Kanshi Ram and his friends live. The Police Superintendent and the Deputy Commissioner try their best to control the situation. The Hindus and the Muslims begin to hate and tear each other.

Muslims-Hindus Prior to & Subsequent to Partition

Everyone knows that India is known for its democracy, different communities and religions are living together without conflict. This has been shaped in the root of the society of India that no religion attacks another. Muslims are free to live according to their own rules and regulation and Hindus and Sikhs... are as well. According to Chaman Nahal, in his Novel 'Azadi' there was a Hindu - Muslim unity and peaceful life before the Partition. Sialkot was a Muslim dominated city. Yet, there was unity among people of all castes. There was seldom any rivalry between Hindus and Muslims. This fact is presented through the friendship of Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhri Barkat Ali and the love of Arun and Nur. Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhri Barkat Ali, who had attended Gandhi's speech at Ramatalai in 1929. Both of them are deeply impressed by Gandhi's view on Hindu-Muslim unity, home industry, nationalism, Purna Swaraj, non-violence, self-discipline and self-sacrifice and have sworn to be life-long friends and never thought of the communal barrier between themselves. Munir-Nur family, headed by Chaudhri Barkat Ali, is an ideal one. They are good Muslims, who believe in the unity of all religions. Chaudhri Barkat Ali is soaked with the spirit of nationalism. He is a devout Muslim, but he respects the Hindus. He lives a life of friendship and love, and does not distinguish between man and man. "And the Hindu next door was as much his brother, more his brother than an unknown Muslim living elsewhere. Chaudhri Barkat Ali is, thus, a strong critic of religious fanaticism. He is the right man with the right kind of ideas. The locality he lives in – Mohalla Mianapura – stands for harmony. Munir shares the goodwill of his father.

Chaudhri Barkat Ali represents sensible and humanistic Muslims, Abdul Ghani, the hookahmaker represents the irrational and fanatical Muslims. As soon as Partition is declared by the government, Abdul Ghani feels ecstatic about it and begins to hate and defy all the Hindus including Lala Kanshi Ram. He asks Lala Kanshi Ram as to when he is leaving Pakistan. Thus, even the best friends begin to drift apart because of the communal hatred aggravated by the partition of the country. The old harmonious co-existence of the Muslims and the Hindus is disrupted overnight by the Partition. The peaceful life of residents of Sialkot and their Hindu-Muslim unity was disturbed by the announcement of Partition by Mountbatten. The first riot took place in Sialkot on the twenty-fourth of June, a day after the Legislative Assembly of the Punjab formally decides in Lahore to opt for the Partition of the province. Nahal narrates the communal fire that spread the country thus: "...Many cities of the Punjab had been aflame for months; there were large scale killings and lootings in Lahore, Gujarat, Gujranwala, Amritsar, Ambala, Jullundur Rawalpindi, Multan, Ludhiana and Sargodha". (104) On twenty fourth of June itself, the Muslims at Sialkot kill some Hindus in their excitement and then it becomes a daily ritual. Nahal narrates the brutality of the act thus:

In no case was the victim allowed to survive the attack and tell what happened; he was stabbed to death. The killing was invariably done with a knife, and often the knife, the large blade driven clean through, was left in the body of the victim. Where the victim survived the first blow, he was repeatedly stabbed in the chest and the abdomen. Faces were not disfigured, but the killers had a macabre fascination for ripping open stomachs. In each case, the intestines of the man would have spilled from the body and would be lying next to him in a pool of his blood. (105)

The fires are started in the different corners of the city at night. It creates an impression that "...the way these fires were spread out, it looked as though some planning went behind them, for the fire engines were harassed to the limit in running from north to south and east to west. But no, the arson too at this stage was only sporadic." (106) Sialkot turns into a riot-torn city, and the Hindu Mohallas are burnt down systematically.

Consequences of Partition & Reconciling the Wounds

Punjab and Bengal are filled with the incidents of murder, arson and rape. There is fear and confusion among the Hindus in Sialkot as they are not getting help from the police and their shops are looted. The Hindu Deputy Commissioner, who controls the situation in Sialkot is murdered by his Muslim bodyguard. Violence is spread on both the sides of the border. Violence turns uncontrollable and completely ruins the atmosphere of trust, love and solidarity and is replaced by hatred, disgust, murder, rape, fire and arson. Trains are targeted by the violent mob. The life of Hindus in Sialkot becomes miserable as their shops and houses are looted, men are stabbing and women are raped. They feel very insecure. Lala is deeply disturbed, when his shop is looted by some Muslims at night. Government has set up many refugee camps to provide shelter for the Hindus and Sikhs. The terms 'Refugee' and 'Refugee Camp' being unfamiliar and unpalatable to Lala, he is unwilling to leave Sialkot to go to the refugee camp. He expresses his anxiety for having become a landless, homeless and rootless man. He is fully aware of the fact that Muslims will not tolerate the presence of Hindus and Sikhs and that the government of Pakistan would not be able to protect them. The life of Hindus in Sialkot becomes miserable. The Hindus are forced to undergo the painful experience of displacement and migration. Despite their deep emotional attachment to their land and home, they are forced to leave them and go in search of new places for final settlement.

Independence brings more violence and killings. Lala's daughter Madhu and her husband Rajiv have been killed when they are in a train on their way to Sialkot to her parents in one of the train massacres. Through the character of Madhu, Nahal narrates his pain when he lost his sister, Kartar Devi, during Partition. The death of Madhu and her husband is based on Nahal's real-life experience. It is obvious that the novelist clearly suggests that

the rioter were deprived enough to dishonor the Hindu women folk and to subject them to beastly atrocities. The administration does not interfere in such incidents. The news of the parade of naked Hindu women by the Muslims in the bazaar of Narowal in the afternoon numbed the Hindus and Sikhs in the camp. Commenting on Nahal's portrayal of the horrid scenes of inexplicable violence, K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri write : "*Azadi* portrays vividly the horrors of the Partition, the colossal violence that still haunts the Indian psyche". (89)

Many years after the partition, the two nations are still trying to heal the wounds left behind by this incision to once-whole body of India. Many are still in search of an identity and a history left behind beyond an impenetrable boundary. The two countries started off with ruined economies and lands and without an established, experienced system of government. They lost many of their most dynamic leaders, such as Gandhi, Jinnah and Allama Iqbal. India and Pakistan have been to war twice since the partition and they are still deadlocked over the issue of possession of Kashmir. The same issues of boundaries and divisions, Hindu and Muslim majorities and differences, still persist in Kashmir. Overall Chaman Nahal ended his novel with a sadly depleted family trying to begin a new life in Delhi. *Azadi* has none of the sensationalism of other novels about India's partition, such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* or Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*. Nahal shows the cruelty as well as the humanity of both sides.

Conclusion

As the above discussion shows, this novel mainly deals with the theme of partition. It is a realistic record of the horrible incidents caused by the partition. It is not less than any tragic novel. It should be also added that, Chaman Nahal in his novel did not try to criticize one religion against other (Muslim against Hindu) In this way Nahal not only objectifies the personal experience but also presents a deliberate contamination of the historical with didactic and situational discursive elements. Almost at the end of the novel this fact had been cleared by him. He wrote: In Delhi Lala Kanshi Ram and others had to see the Muslim abducted women's parade, they felt bad. Soon they saw that a train of the Muslim refugees was attacked and many Muslim were killed. Nahal through his protagonist gave his idea that he did not hate the Muslims because what they did in Pakistan with the Hindus, the Indians did the same with the Muslim in India.

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